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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

**SUBJECT: Assessment of the May 31st Private Meeting in Paris
Between the U. S. and the DRV**

The DRV presentation was tough, but was marked by some significant movement in Hanoi's negotiating stand. Le Duc Tho, the senior DRV representative, did almost all the talking for the North Vietnamese. Following are the key elements of his presentation:

New U. S. /DRV Talks

The continued to resist including the GVN in any private negotiations, but offered to meet with the U. S. bilaterally in private for the discussion of "all" military and political issues related to the war. Previously, Hanoi had said it would only discuss direct U. S. /DRV issues with the U. S., and that we should talk with the NLF on all matters affecting South Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese have apparently concluded that there is little chance for the present that the U. S. will dump the GVN. They are seeking a way to increase the pressure on Washington to eventually make such a change, while in the interim, moving the private talks into a real discussion of the issues. Under the DRV proposal, Hanoi and the U. S. would "reach agreement" on all the "broad principles" related to the war. Following this, the NLF and a "new" Saigon administration without Thieu, Ky or Prime Minister Huong would meet to iron out the details.

The North Vietnamese insisted strongly on the need for elimination of the Saigon leaders and the formation of a "peace cabinet." They reiterated that the NLF would not have to be represented in such a government, apparently to make this a little more palatable. The fact

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that they are offering an interim negotiating arrangement in the form of U.S./DRV talks suggests that they are mainly trying to put us to the test on the question of Saigon's role. If we continue to support Saigon strongly, and the war does not go their way, they could be forced into some further concessions.

They hope, of course, that any private bilateral discussions of political issues between the U.S. and North Vietnam would weaken Saigon by generating widespread fears in the GVN about a secret American sell-out. They almost certainly know that we have pledged to Saigon that they will participate in any talks on political issues.

Agenda for the Talks

There also had a proposal to make regarding the substance of future U.S.-DRV discussions. Under it, we would reach "agreement" on all the "problems mentioned" in the NLF's ten points. After the "agreements" are signed by "all parties" (presumably the U.S., the DRV, the NLF, and the "new" GVN), the parties will then agree on a ceasefire, and all the parties "concerned" will oversee implementation of the agreements.

There are several interesting features to this scheme: it stops short of flatly insisting on the 10 points as the agenda or basis of the discussions; it appears to provide a role for the U.S. in SVN in the implementation of the agreements; it puts off a ceasefire until the political questions are settled. The DRV position on these questions had previously been rather vague.

Military Pressure

There made an especially strong pitch on the question of continuing U.S. battlefield pressure against the Communists. He claimed that the U.S. was still trying to gain a position of strength at the conference table and that, as long as the heavy pressure kept up, the Communists would continue to resist. While this is a fairly standard pitch from the DRV, there was a hint in Tho's remarks that the war might die down if the U.S. eased up. Although it does not appear that the North Vietnamese are eager for a ceasefire, it is possible that their continuing casualties and other military difficulties are causing them to look more favorably on a scaling down of the fighting.

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